CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Sun Mountain Lumber – Cowan Ranch Streamside AP # 2
Proposed Implementation Date:	Upon Signature
Proponent:	Craig Blubaugh – Sun Mountain Lumber
Location:	Sections 25, T28N, R16W (see map)
County:	Hill

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Sun Mountain Lumber (SML) is applying for an Alternative Practice (AP) to relocate an existing road and ditch a 25 foot long portion of a class 2 stream that is currently utilizing the track of the existing road as a channel for approximately 125 feet. A new culvert would be installed in a better location than the existing culvert. This Alternative Practice would facilitate the existing stream flowing through a channel and 25 feet of ditch to a new culvert. This would create the needed separation between an open road and a flowing stream resulting in clean water exiting the project area.

According to MCA 77-5-301 through 307, DNRC is authorized to administer and enforce the provisions of the SMZ Law. This Law was developed to protect the public interest of water quality and quantity within forested areas; provide for standards, oversights and penalties to ensure forest practices conserve the integrity of SMZ's; provide guidelines for wildlife management within SMZ's; and allow operators necessary flexibility to utilize practices appropriate to site-specific conditions in the SMZ. ARM 36.11.301 through 313 further specify the design of SMZ boundaries, allowable activities and prohibitions within the SMZ, penalties and other related provisions.

According to MCA 77-5-304 and ARM 36.11.310, DNRC may approve alternative practices that are different from practices required by the SMZ Law only if such practices would be otherwise lawful and continue to conserve or not significantly diminish the integrity and function of the SMZ. The proximity of the road to the stream channel within the project area has evolved over time to where part of the road (one track) is functioning as the channel for approximately 125 feet. To allow forest practices to utilize this stretch of road will require reconstruction of the road and one stream crossing. This reconstruction/re-alignment would be conducted on in October 2013 during dry weather conditions to minimize sediment entering the stream. This proposed work would require an Alternative Practice from the DNRC as stipulated in Rule 6 in the *Montana Guide to the Streamside Zone Law and Rules 2006* (ARM 36.11.310-313). Additional stipulations of this request would include:

- Installation of slash filter windrows, compacted, in areas where sediment run-off from the road would be possible. Slash windrows would not be burned but allowed to naturally decay in place to allow regeneration to take hold.

- Immediate grass seeding of disturbed areas to prevent run-off and sediment from reaching stream segments.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:
Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

Montana DNRC (Roger Ziesak), Sun Mountain Lumber (Craig Blubaugh) and Hill County Conservation District.

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

Hill County Conservation District was consulted regarding the need for a 310 Permit. None needed for this proposed work.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A – No Action.

This alternative would not utilize this road for forest management activities. The road as-is would still be utilized for ranching and recreation activities.

Alternative B – Action.

Please see *Type and Purpose of Action* for a full description of this alternative.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

Alternative A - No Action

No road realignment would occur. Soils in the area would be impacted by water flowing over the immediate landscape rather than through a channel. This would result in serious degradation of the road through the project area as ranch and recreational vehicles used the road. Top soil layers may be eroded away during high water flows.

Alternative B – Action

Moving the road approximately 25 feet into the adjacent hillside would allow for a clean dry running surface with significantly reduced opportunities for erosion. Grass seeded cut slopes would quickly stabilize. The proposed new culvert location is in an area that was at one time where the stream crossed the road. An old existing channel would once again be utilized. Minimal direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to local geology and soils are expected due to operation restrictions and mitigation measures

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

Alternative A - No Action

Water quality would continue to be reduced as the existing stream channel in the road track continues to be disrupted by vehicle traffic. Multiple muddy stream channels may be created as the stream migrates to different areas of the road surface due to vehicle traffic and natural high water events. Seasonal heavy sediment flows may occur. The current culvert crossing is non-functional and water quality is degrading as it flows across the road.

Alternative B – Action

Mitigation measures include grass seeding and installation of erosion control measures such as a slash-filter windrows on any disturbed area upon completion of operations. DNRC would conduct a post-harvest inspection of all sites. Minimal direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to water quality and quantity are expected due to operation restrictions and mitigation measures.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

N/A

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

Alternative A - No Action

No impacts.

Alternative B – Action

No significant impacts are anticipated as the entire project lies within an existing road right-of-way. Minor disruptions to brush may occur as part of the re-alignment of the road. Natural regeneration of brush would occur and exposed soils would be grass seeded.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

Alternative A – No Action

Water may carry sediment from the road downstream. This potentially could cause detrimental impacts to downstream habitats and alter stream channels.

Alternative B – Action

Since the only part of the stream in the project area lies within one of the road tracks there is no suitable habitat to be found in the project area. The area where the road would be relocated to does not show signs of animal use as it lies within the existing road right-of-way. This project would result in improved downstream habitat as possible sediment flows from the road would no longer occur. Water quality would also be improved and may be beneficial to fish that inhabit reaches of the main channel of Birch creek.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

Alternative A – No Action

The project area does not contain any threatened or endangered species nor have any been identified that seasonally use the area.

Alternative B – Action

If a sighting of any of the listed (or unlisted) species of concern (or evidence such as nests, dens etc…) occurs, operations would be halted, or not allowed, until further assessment can take place. (See attached list for *Species of Concern*)

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

Although no cultural or paleontologic resources are known to exist in the project area, a systematic inventory of such resources is not known to have occurred. Because the project is not located on state land, the DNRC has

no jurisdiction to require private landholders to conduct professional level inventories to identify, or develop treatment plans for, privately owned National Register eligible properties.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Alternative A – No Action

Water flowing down the road may result in widespread channels forming which would create mud bogs from ranch and recreational use. This would be unsightly to some people.

Alternative B – Action

The road is in a small valley and is not visible except to those driving it. This project would creat a situation where a good clean road prism would exist alongside a well defined stream channel – both aesthetically pleasing to the human eye.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

N/A

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

N/A

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

Alternative A – No Action

Travel along this stretch of road would become increasingly difficult and hazardous.

Alternative B – Action

The relocation of the road would significantly improve the safety of this stretch of road.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

N/A

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

Alternative A – No Action

Project would continue without the road improvement. This may result in less volume being harvested.

Alternative B – Action

Project would be allowed during the fall/winter of 2013. Harvest of trees would employ one large crew, (2 sides, approx. 15 workers), over the entire area. In addition this project would provide raw material for local Montana operations.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

Negligible amounts.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

N/A

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

The Cowan Ranch has a forest management plan. Planned activities under this AP are consistent with the plan.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

N/A

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

N/A

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

N/A

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

N/A

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

N/A

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Roger Ziesak	**Date:**	10/2/13
	Title:	Forest Practices Program Manager		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B – Action

- Complete the road relocation and culvert installation as described.

- Mitigation measures would include grass seeding and slash filter windrows placed on disturbed areas to prevent run-off and sediment from reaching stream segments.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

No significant impacts to the integrity and function of the stream in question would occur with the implementation of this project provided the work is done during dry conditions and the required mitigation measures are implemented. As proposed, with mitigations, I do not anticipate any significant direct, indirect or cumulative effects from the implementation of the selected alternative.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

	EIS		More Detailed EA	X	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Clive Rooney
	Title:	DNRC-Northeastern Land Office Area Manager
Signature:		**Date**: